

The Doorway to Freedom

Jean Jose

THE pre-dawn fog enveloped the solitary figure who walked aimlessly along the streets of the sleeping city. She seemed to have traveled a great distance but without an exact destination. Her hair, showing the effects of the dampness, hung loosely around her shoulders; her green coat was pulled closely around her in an attempt to ward off the sharp coldness of the early morning air.

In the mind of this girl a mental struggle which far outweighed any physical one in severity and endurance was determining the course of her life. There were moments in this struggle when the mind was deliberately plotting its own destruction by unbalanced and hasty thinking. Again and again she went over the incident that had happened but a few hours before. Each time she did, the same question plagued her. "How could I have killed her? My best friend, and I have killed her!"

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Barbara and Janet had grown up together, and each was more like a sister to the other than a friend. What one had the other always shared. Their names were constantly linked together; it was an established custom. They had gone through grade school and high school together, and in the spring they were graduating from State University.

This particular weekend they had gone to Springville to visit their friend Kathryn Gray. As they approached the city on the return trip, it was late and Barbara was beginning to feel the effects of the long drive. A dense fog, which had risen during the last few miles, made the driving a slow, nerve-racking procedure.

"Thank heaven, we are almost home; it's 1:00 a. m. I didn't think we would ever make it when this fog came up. I'm so tired I could sleep forever," said Janet as she wearily attempted to maneuver into a more comfortable position.

"You and me both. It will take at least a week to recover from this weekend," replied Barbara.

"Oh, I have to get up so early tomorrow. What a life. You know, I think—Barb! That car—look out!"

The side street was well hidden by the fog, and it was not until the blur of the other car's lights loomed within a few yards of them that Barbara saw it. When she did see the car pull out into the road, a turmoil of thoughts raced through her mind. She must put the brakes on, swerve, or do anything to get out of the way. She must put on the brake! If she swerved, they might miss the other car. She had to move, but she could not. She sat as if frozen to the spot; her hands and feet refused to move. They were upon the intruder, and with a sickening crash the two collided.

Barbara stared, unable to comprehend what had happened. The nervous tension built up before the crash had left; her heart was now beating rapidly, and she trembled from the jolting release of tension that the impact had brought. With horror she saw Janet slumped in the corner of the seat. Her friend lay very still, a deep gash on her forehead bleeding profusely. A strange feeling came over her as she looked at Janet lying so still. She wanted to scream but no sound would come from her lips. Shocked beyond all sensible reasoning, Barbara wanted to run as far and as fast as she could. The car had become a prison and she the prisoner. She had to escape.

She did escape. She ran until she thought her lungs would burst, and even then she could not stop. Walking, running, stumbling through countless streets and down endless sidewalks, all she could see was Janet slumped in the seat of the car. Her mind kept up the incessant questioning. "Why didn't I stop? Plenty of time. Now Janet is dead. I have killed her; I did it—I killed her! Janet dead. Why not me?"

During the early morning hours, Barbara found herself amidst the tracks and signals of the railroad terminal. Even here a deathly silence reigned. Barbara sat down on a make-shift bench and relived the terrible catastrophe over and over. The night was vanishing with the coming of the dawn, but the memory of it would never vanish.

"How can I go back to the life we knew together? I can't. I killed her. Nothing will ever be the same. What can I do? Oh, why didn't I stop! How could I have killed someone I loved so much."

Barbara looked around her, seeing objects she had never noticed before. The faint rays of the sun in the east glowed more majestically than she had ever known them to, and they promised a bright and shining day. The city, so large and wondrously quiet, seemed to radiate peace throughout her soul and mind. She had found something that now ran through her entire being, giving her assurance and wiping away the many obstacles in her mind. For the first time, she felt close to God as an important part of His great creation, the world. She was seeing differently, and feeling an enveloping warmth that she was unable to explain. It was as if someone had opened a door to her which had locked away all the beauty and serenity of life, and she had been set free from her doubts and ignorance of life. The value of living overcame her with a mysterious rapturous feeling.

The city started stretching and yawning as Barbara rose and began her walk back to the heart of the city. A few people were already preparing for the day ahead. A sleepy milkman went from door to door obviously rattling his bottles as loudly as possible in an attempt to awaken his more fortunate customers. As Barbara passed a corner drugstore, a truck pulled up to the curb; and a bundle of the first edition of the morning paper was thrown to the sidewalk. She picked up one of the papers and glanced over the front page. Holding a prominent position was the story of an automobile accident in which a mys-

tery driver had vanished from the scene and had not been located. The story also related that the passenger in the mystery driver's car had been taken to the hospital to be treated for minor head injuries. Barbara tucked the paper snugly under her arm as though it were the most precious thing she owned and started quickly for the hospital.

The figure that ascended the steps of City Hospital early that morning exhibited a glow that seemed to spread to everyone around her. She had found a doorway to freedom.

The Autumn of Shame

Gundars Grislitis

THE second World War was at its hottest point in Europe. The western front was slowly moving toward the boundaries of Germany; Belgium, the Netherlands, and France were already free from the Nazis' forces. On the southern front the American troops were marching toward Rome, the capital city of Italy, but the heaviest action was on the eastern front. The Russian army, armed mostly with American equipment, pushed the Germans back from Leningrad in the north, from Minsk in the middle section, and from Kiev and Odessa in the southern part. By the autumn of 1944 the Russian troops had crossed the eastern boundary of Latvia and, as there was little or no resistance at all by the Germans, moved on rapidly, leaving no hopes for the Latvian people. By the end of September, Riga, the capital city of Latvia and one of the old cities of Hanza, was in the hands of the Reds; and a few weeks later their forces stood only two miles east of Priekule, the city where I was born and spent my childhood.

It was the morning of October 13, 1944. The first gleam of the rising sun was just appearing over the roofs of the houses; the autumn wind, not strong, but cold enough, was rushing through the streets; the air was still wet and cold. But what was unusual was the monotonous noise of cannons and guns shooting, and bombs exploding. We turned on the radio. The only one of the four Latvian broadcasting stations still in the German hands was just playing the hated "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" and praising Adolf Hitler and his Wehrmacht. But we did not believe them. The cannons, coming nearer and nearer, the airplanes, both the Russian and the German Luftwaffe, told us undoubtedly the real situation. All of a sudden the streets were crowded with people—men and women running, carrying boxes and sacks, soldiers, tired, hungry, and hopeless, walking slowly, their guns unloaded, their uniforms half gone. Horse-pulled wagons rolled through and from the city like an endless stream—farmers with sacks of grain in their wagons, cattle and horses tied to the corners of their wagons; there were also the city